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ABSTRACT

A field experience program in which all undergraduate psychology students at the College of St. Scholastica spend about 10 weeks away from campus in an applied setting of their choice is presented. Components of the program are described in terms of: (1) selection of sites made by students in consultation with faculty advisors; (2) proposals specifying their objectives along with the methods and activities they plan to use; (3) daily logs of their activities and, at the end of their practicum, summaries of their experiences in the form of a written report; and (4) evaluation of the report by two faculty members and a supervisor from the host agency which becomes a part of the student's transcript. (Author)

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SELF-GUIDED FIELD EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

All undergraduate psychology students at the College of St. Scholastica spend about ten weeks away from campus in an applied setting of their choice. Selection of sites is made by the students in consultation with their faculty advisors. Prior to beginning their work students develop proposals specifying their objectives along with the methods and activities they plan to use. Students keep daily logs of their activities and then at the end of their practicum summarize their experiences in the form of a written report. The report is read by two faculty members and a supervisor from the host agency who then meet with the student in an informal setting to discuss the field experience. A brief summary of what a student has done during the field experience becomes a part of the student's transcript. Employers find this information helpful in making hiring decisions. Field experience enables the students to obtain a realistic appraisal of the world of work, helps them in making career decisions, and assists them in acquiring useful skills for employment.

SELF-GUIDED FIELD EXPERIENCE

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A large proportion of students who enter the field of psychology at the undergraduate level do not pursue academic work beyond the B.A. level. But the traditional undergraduate curriculum is not designed to help them secure full-time employment upon graduation. Unless we do something about it, the situation is likely to become worse due to the highly competitive nature of the job market. Pinkus and Korn (1973) conducted a survey of social service agencies and business community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and surrounding suburbs. Their aim was to find knowledge, skills and experience looked for by the employers in hiring B.A.-level people. All of the employers participating in this study considered field experience to be an essential aspect in training at the undergraduate level. Not only did these agencies emphasize the importance of experience, most of them indicated that they would be willing to provide it either on a voluntary or paid basis.

The field experience is important not only in terms of securing employment, but as pointed out by Shiverick (1977), also has other significant benefits such as:

(1) it provides for complete immersion in and realistic appraisal of the world of work.
(2) it helps them in making decisions about future careers and plans for graduate school.
(3) it helps the students in acquiring skills which are looked at favorably by the potential employers.

Field experience thus provides a transition from classroom education to on-the-job activity. (Maas and Kleiber, 1975).

The curriculum at the College of St. Scholastica, has, therefore, been revised to include a number of new courses and a full-time field experience for a quarter. To provide the students with a meaningful academic prevocational experience, this field experience is taken by students during their senior year.

The remainder of this paper will be devoted to describe the characteristics, assumptions and rationale of our model of self-guided field experience for undergraduate students.

1. The responsibility of learning is upon the individual. Self direction and responsibility add meaning to the learning experience. The model emphasizes that students need to become active and aggressive in their learning roles. This implies that they should seek out activities which will provide them the kind of experiences they would like to have.
2. Field experience must stimulate individually defined competencies. Since there are large individual differences, a field experience program should, not force all students to achieve along a single, linear dimension. Therefore, the faculty should provide for diversity in experience by having a list of available sites representing different interest areas. Examples of sites used by our students during recent years can be found in Appendix A.
3. Variation in their projects eliminates any normative-based assessment. This puts more responsibility on each student to achieve individually (Caffrey, Berger, Cole, Marx and Senn, 1977). Evaluation of field experience is the joint responsibility of the student, the adviser and the field supervisor(s). It tends more towards criterion-referenced than towards norm-referenced assessment. The field supervisor(s) are also provided with the copy of the student's proposal. They find it useful not only in facilitating appropriate placements for the students but also in assessing their progress.
4. To be motivated to develop certain competencies one must see the need for these competencies. The students are motivated to learn because they see the personal values and relevance of the field experience they have selected for themselves.
5. It is important for the students to be clear concerning their objectives for the field experience. Without clearly specifying the objectives students will not know (i) what they are trying to achieve, (ii) how they plan to achieve it, or (iii) whether or not they are successful (Johnson, 1972). This means that <u>before</u> the students begin their field experience they should develop a proposal specifying clearly the objectives they aim to achieve and how they are going to achieve them. See Appendix B for a sample of objectives developed by one of our students.

6. Students learn by observation as well as by direct experience. Working in the field for 10-11 weeks gives them ample opportunities to observe a number of supervisors and other personnel in a variety of situations. Since they are exposed to different role models they may synthesize features of these models into new amalgams of styles of thought and behavior (Bandura, 1973). Usually during a given quarter only one or two students are allowed at each site. This allows for greater contact with the supervisors and precludes the student's hindering the staff's activities.
7. While field experience is a stimulating and involving activity, experience alone is not enough. Learning is maximized when the experience is combined with the conceptualization of the experience. In our model, therefore, students keep daily logs of their activites and then at the end of the quarter summarize their experiences in the form of a written report. This helps them build framework of knowledge to organize what they have learned. It also enables them to relate their course work to their experiences during the internship. The report is read by two faculty members and a supervisor from the host agency who then meet with the student in an informal setting and discuss the field experience. Students also make oral presentations of their work in the psychology club meetings which are attended by students interested in field experience.
8. When the students are writing their objectives or working in the field they see the need for further reading in the area related to their field experience. Thus they develop their own reading list in consultation with their faculty adviser and/or field experience. Some students have also indicated that they get more out of a course or courses they have taken after completing the field experience. As a result of working in the field they have become more aware of the value of in-depth study in certain areas.

9. In this model the faculty adviser takes a non-directive approach. He provides information on what is available if and when the students ask for this information. He answers questions about the relative value of different field settings but the request for seeking this information should come from the student. After the student has selected the site for his field experience she is asked to develop her goals and objectives which are then approved by the faculty adviser. Students, on their own initiative, arrange to have periodic report sessions with their advisors.
10. A brief summary of what a student has done during the field experience becomes a part of the student's transcript. This provides potential employers with important information about the student's background and experience which they find helpful in making hiring decisions.

We have several indicators regarding the effectiveness of the model and the value of field experience as an important component of undergraduate education in psychology. These indicators include:

(a) Students have no difficulty in finding a suitable setting for field experience.

(b) Many places which have taken students in the past continue to ask for more students.

(c) Several agencies have hired students on completion of their field experience.

(d) In many cases students have gone to graduate school <u>after</u> completing the field experience or working in an applied setting for a year or two. On-the-job experience is a good motivator for graduate studies.

(e) As a result of this program good relationships have developed between the faculty members and the psychologists working in the field. We have become more aware of the needs of the community and what can be done to meet those needs.

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APPENDIX A

SITES USED FOR "FIELD EXPERIENCE" BY PSYCHOLOGY MAJORS

1. *2001 - A chemical dependency treatment center for young people.
2. Human Development Center.
3. Crisis Shelter.
4. Woodland Hills Boys Home.
5. Pre-school Project for Handicapped Children.
6. Children's Health Center, Minneapolis,
7. Veteran's Hospital, St. Cloud.
8. United Day Activity Center.
9. Nat Polinsky Rehabilitation Center.
10. East High School (Counseling Department).
11. Duluth Receiving Center.
12. Brainerd State Hospital.
13. Mooselake State Hospital.
14. Duluth Association for Retarded Citizens.
15. Duluth Sheltered Workshop.
16. Summer Camp for Retarded People.
17. Alternatives - A Crisis Intervention Center.
18. Minnesota State Senate, St. Paul.
19. George Washington Elementary School, Cloquet.

* Unless otherwise indicated all sites are located in Duluth.

APPENDIX B

COLLEGE OF ST. SCHOLASTICA

Name of the Student: **Name of DAP:** Counseling at the Crisis Shelter

Location of DAP: Crisis Shelter
1830 East Fourth Street
Duluth, MN 55805

DAP Supervisor:

Campus Supervisor:

Duration of DAP: Winter Quarter 1978 (January 9 - March 13)
30-35 hours per week

DAP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

1. To apply the educational background I have received at the College of St. Scholastica.
2. To develop effective communication skills that will aid me in helping people.
3. To gain a better understanding of the counseling field and what is necessary to be an effective counselor.
4. To be of real value in helping the residents at the Crisis Shelter.
5. To gain a better understanding of myself as a person and how I relate to other people.

METHODOLOGY THAT WILL BE USED:

1. Getting involved with the residents and their families at the Crisis Shelter and letting them know that I am available and willing to be of service to them.
2. Keeping a daily journal of happenings, their effects, and my feelings during the duration of my DAP at the Crisis Shelter.
3. Observing the other counselors and attending staff meetings.
4. Working with Jane Opskar, my supervisor, and enabling her to help understand my role as a counselor.

EVALUATION BASED ON:

1. Ask Jane Opskar and Bill Paulsen of the Crisis Shelter to write an evaluation of how effective I have been as a counselor.
2. Write a paper on my DAP and experiences at the Crisis Shelter; and then give an oral presentation before a panel consisting of: Jane Opskar, Chandra Mehrotra, and members of the Psychology Department at the College of St. Scholastica.
3. Have periodic report sessions with Chandra Mehrotra.

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Student's Signature Advisor's Signature